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## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT EIS

USDA FOREST SERVICE

SOUTHERN REGION

U.S.D.A., NAL

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# Questions and Answers

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**Q.** What does vegetation management mean? I haven't heard the term very often.

**A.** A simple definition of management is to direct or control. So, vegetation management is often said to be control of unwanted plants. Stated more positively, the Forest Service manages vegetation for some public benefit: wildlife food or shelter, wood products, recreation, safety, . .

**Q.** This is very confusing. First, we had Forest Plans to address all these problems, but now you're doing another EIS. Will the Forest Service use this EIS to increase timber harvests or to justify building more roads?

**A.** Some of the goals in Forest Plans involve timber harvest and road construction. This EIS does not change those goals in any way. Rather it evaluates the effects of vegetation management needed to reach them. This need for vegetation management is clearly identified in Forest Plans but usually not analyzed in detail, as is done in this EIS. For example, all plans show that site preparation is needed but don't compare effects from different methods that could be used to do site preparation.

**Q.** Most of us are deeply concerned about effects on wildlife, water, humans, soil, and other parts of the environment. Vegetation management sounds like growing pine farms, and I don't see how it helps any of these other resources.

**A.** Forests are managed for multiple uses, many of which benefit from vegetation management. Though timber management is usually thought of as the most obvious place for vegetation management, it is actually only about 40 percent (about 40,000 acres) of the annual total. Vegetation management is needed for safe operation and maintenance of electric lines and roads and is essential to reduce risks of damage from wildfires. In addition, it produces food and cover for wildlife and keeps trails clear of brush and vines. The EIS looks at a variety of ways to have multiple uses while being responsive to people's concerns about effects.

**Q.** How did you decide on the preferred alternative and why is it preferred?

**A.** When we looked for a "preferred" alternative, we sought one which responded well to concerns raised by the public, and one which promoted forest health and met output goals set by Forest Plans. Eight alternatives, ranging from no treatments at all to highly intensive use of machines, fire, and herbicides were fully studied. The extreme alternatives, no management or highly intensive management, posed unacceptable risks. The preferred alternative reduces the intensity of all methods from current levels. It calls for a slight decrease in acres treated with herbicides, mandating application methods and herbicide selection standards that minimize risks to people, wildlife, and non-target plants. Mechanical treatments also occur on fewer acres than currently.



**Q.** Why "manage" vegetation at all? Can't nature do that alone?

**A.** Forests are expected to provide outputs like recreation, wood, water, wildlife, and forage and to coexist with modern society. Producing these outputs and protecting society from threats like insects, diseases, and wildfires usually requires vegetation management. This means "just letting nature manage" is a very risky alternative. Doing nothing would gradually diminish the capacity of forests to produce many outputs like recreation (national forests are the number one producer of outdoor recreation in the nation), or wood products (national forests hold a 25 percent share of the wood products market), or possibly even employment (national forests generate about 1/2 million jobs in the private sector). However, managing doesn't mean doing things contrary to nature; often it's just speeding up or slowing natural processes to achieve the desired output in harmony with nature.

**Q.** There are alternatives which show areas being treated with herbicides applied by helicopters. Does this mean that aerial application is going to be done?

**A.** No. The preferred alternative does not include aerial application. Other alternatives which did include it were designed that way so that all options, including aerial application, could be evaluated.

**Q.** What about effects on non-targets? Won't herbicides kill anything they get on?



**A.** One reason 11 herbicides are evaluated (only 7 are proposed for use) is that each controls only certain kinds of plants, that is, each usually won't kill every kind of plant. Additionally, the way herbicides are applied (broadcast vs. selective) determines possible effects on non-targets (we avoid getting herbicides on them). All of the other methods (fire, mechanical, manual, and biological) may also affect non-targets. Regardless of the method used, some precautions (mitigation measures) are used to limit these effects.

**Q.** How can we be sure the analysis of herbicides is accurate? We understand that most of the data came from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or directly from the chemical companies.

**A.** When dealing with such sensitive issues as possible effects on humans, it is important to obtain the best information. The chemical companies and EPA have technical information not available any place else. It would not make sense to ignore this information. However, data were also collected from many other sources. Then, to check accuracy and reliability, the analysis was reviewed by numerous toxicologists, medical professionals, chemists, and other scientists, many of whom are independent of the chemical companies and government.



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